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SOUTHERN AFRICA

SUCCESS STORY

Promoting Participatory Action Planning

USAID facilitates innovative approach to build consensus for multi-national river basin management



Photo: Nathaniel Thalerwa

Okavango River Basin stakeholders from three nations contributed to planning and prioritization of actions during a strategic planning workshop in February, 2005

USAID programs are building institutional capacity to mitigate conflict over shared water resources in Southern Africa while meeting development needs and protecting biodiversity.

"This process has been a stakeholder designed event and the process of bringing everyone together was excellent... I would like to commend USAID for doing that."

- Director of the Namibian Nature Foundation

The Permanent Okavango River Basin Water Commission (OKACOM) provides advice on the management of the Okavango river basin to three riparian states: Angola, Botswana, and Namibia. An institutional challenge for OKACOM is getting stakeholder consensus in the planning and coordinated implementation of basin-wide programs. Providing opportunities for managers and resource users to be involved in decision-making improves the sense of ownership and increases stakeholder participation in implementation.

At OKACOM's request, USAID designed and facilitated a strategic action planning workshop for commissioners, civil society representatives and managers of regional donor projects to gather recommendations, build strong inter-organizational partnerships, and prepare an action plan. This was the first time OKACOM and its key stakeholders collectively prepared action strategies for basin-wide programs. The workshop participants determined that initiatives should focus on water resources monitoring and community-based programs in Angola, since almost all the water for the basin originates in that country. This acknowledged consensus allowed stakeholders to develop and prioritize a comprehensive list of specific and concrete actions to be implemented with assistance from USAID and other donors. OKACOM uses this list as a tool to monitor progress.

Based on this participatory experience, OKACOM and its member states' technical agencies are actively involved in water resources monitoring, establishing improved communication networks, and supporting community-based initiatives. One example of improved coordination is the new linkages formed between OKACOM, local government, communities, and civil society in the Kuanda Kubango Province in Angola. Socio-ecological assessments of communities in the Province have been completed with support from USAID and other donors and the results are being shared and applied to design pilot environmental management projects that integrate external assistance with local and national government programs.